

Deborah O'Connor-Tamaccio

Newington, CT

March 16, 2022

HB 5322: AN ACT CONCERNING THE CREATION OF A HUMAN SERVICES PERMIT AND A REQUIREMENT THAT SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS CONDUCT HOME VISITS DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR.

Dear Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Representative Turco, Senator Lesser, and Honorable Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Deborah O'Connor-Tamaccio, and I live in Newington. I am writing to you today on two fronts. I am a social worker at the CREC Polaris Center in East Hartford, and I am the parent of a Newington 5th grader who receives social work support as part of a 504 plan. I am respectfully asking you NOT to support HB 5322, which creates a mandate for school social workers to conduct home visits.

In my role as a school social worker, I visit student homes for various reasons, usually related to the child not attending school. These visits are typically coordinated through the adult(s) in the home, but can also be unannounced. Families do have the right to refuse home visits, which some families do. It does not appear that this bill takes into account the family's perspective on how uncomfortable it can be to open their home to school personnel, or even feeling pressured to do so.

As a parent who works full time, I would find it highly disruptive to have the school social worker come to my home if not necessary. My daughter and her social worker have developed a positive and trusting relationship during this school year. My husband and I have encouraged our daughter that her relationship with her school social worker is safe – this is her person that she can talk openly with. To then extend that relationship into our home carries the risk of our daughter feeling as though a boundary has been crossed. From a fifth grader's perspective, if this is my person at school, but then she starts coming to my house and meeting with my family, is this really my person? Is what I talk with her about really private? I fully trust that if I

needed Mrs. Lammlin to visit my home, she would make arrangements to do so. I also have full confidence in her clinical judgement in terms of whether a home visit is warranted at any time.

As a school social worker, every time I enter a home, I have to consider the risk to myself. Who is to ensure my safety when I go out to a student home, particularly when the family has not invited me, but I am instead required to do so? I make it a priority to build positive rapport with each of the families I work with. If I were to “require” families to allow me into their homes, I am putting an unnecessary strain on the relationship both with the child (as I am the student’s social worker first) and the family, who may be entirely uncomfortable having a service provider come into their home. I am also creating a burden for the working parent who must now adjust their schedule to meet mine, and taking time away from the direct service I provide to my students.

Home visits are a regular part of my role. There are times when going to visit a student home is the best or only approach to engage with a student and/or caregiver. As a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in the State of Connecticut, I would ask the Committee to trust my clinical judgement and expertise on when such an intervention may be necessary or beneficial.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Deborah O’Connor, LCSW